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AUTHOR Barr-Johnson, Virginia; Erwin, Tina
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ABSTRACT

To explore the effects of competition in a state fair art show on high school art students' self-concepts, three hypotheses were investigated. It was expected that (1) a significant majority of students entering the art competition would have an internal locus of control; (2) students who were characterized by an internal locus of control would primarily attribute the outcome of the contest to specific internal causes; and (3) students who entered the art competition and who were external in locus of control, regardless of acceptance or rejection, would primarily attribute the outcome to specific external causes. As a pretest, students were administered the Trent Attribution Profile (TAP), a measure providing internality scores under success and failure conditions. The independent or experimental variable was the competitive art event. The dependent variable was perceived in terms of the entrants' scores on the Gill and Cross Attribution Questionnaire -- a measure of locus of control similar to the TAP. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were confirmed: a significant majority of students entering the art competition were characterized as internal in locus of control and these students attributed acceptance or rejection of their work to specific internal causes. Hypothesis 3 was not justified, for only one student was involved in this group. (Author/RH)

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DOES COMPETITION DESTROY SELF-CONCEPT?

Virginia Barr-Johnson, Ph.D.
Professor, Visual Arts
College of Education
University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida 32816

Tina Erwin, M.Ed.
Art Teacher
Oakridge High School
Orlando, Florida

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Competition in sports is taken for granted; however, there are arguments on both sides of the question as to whether or not the competition strengthens or weakens self-concept. The winners of sports competition are assumed to have their positive self-concepts enhanced. Even the losers have something to feel good about -- just the fact that they were competent enought to be "on the team" makes them feel better than others who did not "make the team," or weren't even good enough to try out for the team.

What about other kinds of competition which students in the schools are exposed to or are encouraged to enter? There are contests or meets in almost every discipline, ranging from the Scholastic Bowls for the intellectually gifted, the music contests for the musicians, the art contests for the artists, the debate contests for the clever orators, the math and science contests, and many, many others.

Knowing that the adolescent, particularly, is undergoing a stage in his life which is fraught with problems of self-image, research needs to look at what happens to the "winners" and "losers" in competition in the schools. Measurement of any self-concept is difficult. Measurement of self-concept in relation to art production and art processes is very difficult, inasmuch as aesthetic endeavour encourages freedom of expression and originality. Who then can judge its worth, and what happens to the self-concept of the art student whose art work when entered in competition is rejected?

Much verbal debate surrounds competition versus cooperation in education. Tools suitable for assessing some of the disciplines are available, but other areas are void of instruments to measure the results of rejection and acceptance in competition. Art education is particularly lacking in assessment tools; inasmuch as art education differs from other subject areas in methodology, it has a distinct reputation for encouraging freedom of thought and expression. Some claim that the notion of contests should be as foreign to art education as it is to philosophy or religion. According to Tollifson (1975), "The world is becoming dehumanized, the crying need is for a common feeling of mutual acceptance. No contest is the answer for education!" Other art educators blame this view for a decline in evaluation criteria in art classes. In some cases, they charge that work of meager quality still favors teacher approval, as long as its production was marked by enjoyment (Asch, 1976).

Succeeding or failing in art class may have lifelong ramifications in individual creative endeavors. Lacking long range feasibility and a variety of acknowledged instruments to measure win-lose situations, a project was devised to measure locus of control and attribution. This plan allowed research into the subtle relationships between art students' pre-contest internality, and, following the judging and its outcome, the entrants' perceptions of the contest results and their causes.

These relationships between pre- and post-contest perceptions were measured by three means: 1) a pretest of locus of control (Trent Attribution Profile), 2) an annual state-sponsored art exhibition (Tampa State Fair Art Show), and 3) a post-test attribution procedure developed by Gill and Cross in 1978.

In spite of groans by the students to the contrary, there is important art learning to be gained through constructive evaluative practices involved in criticism offered at the Florida State Fair Youth Fine Arts Exhibition, as well as in other competition available to the high school students in art classes. Inherent in creative production is the element of reflective thinking - the ability to analyze each stage in the development of ideas. The evaluative criteria internalized by the artist are the skills needed to identify quality, improvement, and future directions. This research was designed to analyze the relationship among internality, creativity, and success (or failure).

Locus of control is a measure of generalized expectancies for internal vs. external control of reinforcement. The degree to which a person perceives positive or negative events as being a consequence of one's own actions and thus personally controlled is internal locus of control. On the other hand, external locus of control is the degree to which a person perceives positive or negative events as being unrelated to one's own behavior, and therefore, beyond person control (Schneider, 1977).

Competition cannot be avoided in life situations. Goodman (1978) offered the following reasons why high school students should be introduced to the competitive side of the real world: 1) American society is highly competitive therefore it is necessary to allow students in school to function on a competitive basis, 2) the culture of the educational system is already engrained and 3) there exists a lack of something better to replace the old competitive system. Actually, the further one advances in school, the more competition exists for grades, honors, and other rewards.

Efforts to construct valid and reliable instruments to assess artistic

learning are only very recent. Thus, the instruments used in this research are psychologically, rather than artistically, oriented.

The concept of locus of control has been debated for approximately the last fifteen years, and attribution theory can be traced back about ten years, so obviously these are still fairly new frontiers. Competitive exhibitions are a fact of life for artists and craftsmen in today's world. Cardinale (1977) indicated that the phenomenon of competition is certainly not a new one, for there is evidence of competitions in Vasari's Lives of Artists as early as the 1400's

In establishing a relationship between creativity and a measurable personality construct, locus of control literature was reviewed. It supports the theory that locus of control is positively correlated with internality (Churchill, 1976), and that creative individuals focus on traits of autonomy, self-motivation, task involvement, assertiveness, and competence. Friedman (1977) cited...internals will attribute both success and failure more to ability than externals will." Research seems to point to the belief that creative individuals possess an internal locus of control, but that having an internal locus of control does not necessarily imply creativity.

The Trent Attribution Profile is supported by relevant literature and is designated as an appropriate measure for providing separate scores of internality under success and failure conditions (Wong, 1978).

The hypotheses adopted for this study were: 1) a significant majority of students entering the art competition possess an internal locus of control as revealed by the Trent Attribution Profile (TAP), 2) students who have an internal locus of control primarily attribute the outcome of the contest to specific internal causes as revealed by the Gill and Cross Attribution Questionnaire (G&C), and 3) students entering the art

competition and possessing an external locus of control, regardless of acceptance or rejection, primarily attribute the outcome to specific external causes.

The independent or experimental variable was the competitive art event (Tampa State Fair Art Show) or the presumed cause; while the dependent variable was perceived in terms of the art entrants' scores on the Gill and Cross Attribution Questionnaire, the presumed effect.

The design of the study involved students of five art teachers at a senior high school who were administered the Trent Attribution Profile as a pretest, with the same instrument administered [redacted] following the acceptance or rejection of the students' art products at the Tampa State Fair Art Show. Data collection involved less than a week, so problems with concurrent events, maturation, and population attrition were minimized.

Inasmuch as no control group was used, the experimental group (art students entering competition) was measured on the dependent variable (locus of control) and given the experimental treatment (artwork judging). According to Turney (1971), the group is then measured on the same variable, and the comparison is made between the means on the two measurements.

TABLE I

TRENT ATTRIBUTION PROFILE
(Pretest) Results

OVERALL RESULTS	Ability	Effort	Task Difficulty	Luck	Inter-nality	Exter-nality
Total Points	1765	1923	1388	1103	3688	2491
Internals N=40	28.6%	31.1%	22.5%	17.8%	59.7%	40.3%
Total Points	28	25	34	29	53	63
Externals N=1	24.1%	21.6%	29.3%	25.0%	46.0%	54.0%

In Table I the arithmetic mean indicates that 40 of 41 art students credit ability and effort as dominant factors in their lives, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1 (a significant majority of students entering the art competition possess an internal locus of control). The only externally oriented student relied more on circumstances and luck in perceiving outcomes. The students were consistent in rating each factor; approximately 30 percent ability, 30 percent effort, 20 percent task difficulty and 20 percent luck.

TABLE II

GILL AND CROSS ATTRIBUTION QUESTIONNAIRE

(Posttest) Results

OVERALL RESULTS	Ability	Effort	Task Difficulty	Luck	Inter-nality	Exter-nality
Total Points	1430	1456	726	388	2886	1114
Internals N=40	35.8%	36.4%	18.1%	9.7%	72.2%	27.8%
Total Points	30	30	20	20	60	40
Externals N=1	30.0%	30.0%	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	40.0%

The Gill and Cross Attribution Questionnaire provided the results for Hypothesis 2 (students who have an internal locus of control primarily attribute the outcome of the contest to specific internal causes). The internal art students awarded ability and effort even more responsibility, even though only half of those entering were accepted for the show.

Hypothesis 3, concerning external TAP scores predicting external Gill and Cross scores was not justified inasmuch as only one student was involved.

The research in analyzing the effects of entering competition for art students in high school is still very minimal. The psychological outcomes of acceptance or rejection of art work for a show (based on a group of judges' opinions) on a purely objective basis may have lasting effects for an adolescent wrestling with positive and negative self-concept in other aspects of his life.

In addition to the state-sponsored contests, national scholarship contests are available to the students. These are even more definitive as to "winners" and "losers" because future schooling is frequently determined by the scholarship and money awards connected with them. One might suppose that age and maturity factors would reveal a subtle progression from more popular external attributions (powerful others, luck, task difficulty) to the internalized motivation expressed by these students who seemed almost too willing to assume the blame for their rejection.

This study reasserts what locus of control literature has established; that creativity and internality are positively correlated. By focusing on a specific competitive event for high school art classes, it was confirmed that internals attribute outcomes more to themselves. Acceptance and rejection appear to be part of normal existence at this age. Therefore, the students did not seem to be diminished by their rejection in the competition, but as they stated in their comments, "It is learning your faults and mistakes and realizing you must try again." With this attitude, the students are all winners.

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